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ABSTRACT

Investigation of the relationship between maternal employment and behaviors and attitudes (encompassing parental relationships; personal problems, educational/career aspirations; future life; sex role ideology) of preadolescents and adolescents indicated significant differences only for preadolescents regarding sex role ideology. Working mother children more frequently favored the working mother role. Also, working mother daughters, compared with sons, more frequently supported this notion, as did working mother children of managerial and working class, but not professional class, families. Results suggest full-time maternal employment has few effects on behaviors and attitudes of school-age children from intact families, these effects diminishing along the developmental continuum. There is no substantial evidence indicating that maternal employment has a detrimental effect or even a consistently differentiating effect on behavior and attitudes of children. (Author)

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MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT AND SELECTED BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES OF PREADOLESCENTS AND ADOLESCENTS

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Running head: Maternal Employment

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The present study was initiated to assess the relationship of maternal employment/nonemployment to behaviors and attitudes of children at two developmental levels -- preadolescent and adolescent.

Typically, investigations on this topic have attempted to establish an association between maternal employment and selected personality characteristics in order to determine the adjustment/maladjustment of children. The results of these studies, at the elementary school level, indicate that generally, children's adjustment is not adversely affected by the mother's working (Etaugh, 1974; Hoffman, 1974; Wallston, 1973) nor are there any clear findings for more frequent maladjustment or delinquency in adolescent children of working mothers (Burchinal, 1963; Collins, 1975; Nelson, 1971; Riege, 1972; Roy, 1963). No convincing evidence, therefore, has emerged to buttress the conventionally held view that school age children are somehow victimized if their mothers are employed. As suggested by Wallston (1973), however, children of working mothers may differ on dimensions that may not necessarily indicate maladjustment. They may demonstrate differences that simply indicate an adaptation or accommodation to this transformation in the family structure which has increasingly become a typical pattern of family life.

The present investigation, therefore, rather than focussing on personality characteristics or dependent variables showing good or bad effects,

examined an array of specific behaviors and attitudes that may be affected by maternal employment: parental relationships, personal problems, educational and career aspirations, future life expectations, and sex role ideology. It sought to determine whether children of full-time working mothers as compared with children of nonworking mothers, different on these dimensions; whether they differed within groups in terms of sex and socioeconomic status; and whether these differences, if any, were shared by preadolescents and adolescents.

Review of Related Research

The studies on maternal employment reviewed below pertain to preadolescents and adolescents and relate to the specific variables on which the present subjects were questioned. While not exhaustive, generally, like maladjustment, they present no clear-cut or consistently accumulating evidence pointing to definitely established differences between children of working and nonworking mothers at either developmental level.

Some studies, at the adolescent level, have considered specific aspects of parental relationships. Douvan (1963) found that adolescent daughters of full-time working mothers, compared with daughters of part-time or nonworking mothers, spent relatively little time with the family. However, boys of full-time working mothers more frequently shared leisure time activities with parents. While Douvan (1963) noted that adolescent daughters of working mothers were more likely to name their mothers as the person they most admired, both Douvan (1963) and Propper (1972) reported that sons of lower class, full-time working mothers were less likely to name their fathers as the person they most admired.

With respect to personal problems, Whitemarsh (1965) reported that adolescent daughters of working mothers identified fewer total problems and

fewer home related problems on a problem check list than did daughters of homemakers; and Douvan (1963) found that daughters of full-time working mothers were more likely to turn to their mothers if they had a problem. These results are not consonant, however, with an earlier Maccoby (1958) study wherein adolescent daughters of working mothers were unwilling to discuss their problems and activities with their parents and felt that their parents did not understand them, nor with Propper's (1972) study of lower-class adolescents which found the mother's employment status to be unrelated to parental help with school or personal problems, for both sexes. Propper (1972) did find, however, that children of working mothers were more likely to disagree with their parents over a wide range of issues.

Regarding household responsibilities, several studies (Johnson, 1968; Roy, 1963) indicate that adolescent children of working mothers have more household chores than children of nonworking mothers. Propper's (1972) data on the same subject, however, revealed a significant difference for boys only. At the preadolescent level, Hoffman (1963) found a greater assignment of home responsibilities to be associated only with working mothers who disliked working.

Punishment-when investigated in recent studies-concerns preadolescents and focuses on maternal severity (Franke, 1972) and maternal consistency (Woods, 1972) rather than on the dispenser of punishment as in the present study. Franke found that females perceived their working mothers as more severe, while males perceived their nonworking mothers as more severe. Woods reported that working mothers were more consistent in their punishments.

Proving sex role ideology, a number of studies found that preadolescent (Hartley, 1960) and adolescent (Banducci, 1967; Smith, 1969) daughters of working women were more likely to view favorably working outside the home when they became mothers, and King, McIntyre & Axelson (1968), reported that

junior high school males and females with working mothers were more likely to be acceptant of maternal employment in a marriage, an attitude, however, more true of males than females. But a more recent study (Griggs, 1972) with respect to beliefs regarding the dual role pattern, concluded that male and female high school seniors whose mothers worked outside the home, as compared with those mothers were not employed, had less favorable attitudes toward mothers and wives working.

Regarding educational aspirations, Roy (1963) found that amongst rural high school students, both sons and daughters of working mothers were more likely to plan to go to college, than were children of nonworking mothers. With respect to the urban sample, however, the children of working mothers were less likely to plan on college attendance. Studying high school seniors, Banducci, (1967) reported that for sons and daughters of laborers and skilled workers, maternal employment was positively associated with college aspirations, but for children of professional fathers, maternal employment was significantly related to lower college aspirations in both males and females.

Studies investigating career aspirations, have focused primarily on the relationship between maternal employment and type of occupation selected by females -- typicality or atypicality -- and these have been mostly at the college level. Almquist and Angri (1970) and Tangri (1972) studying college females found that daughters of working mothers more often choose careers in the less conventionally female areas, results that are congruent with those of Douvan's (1963) earlier study at the high school level which found that the proportion of girls choosing traditionally masculine occupations was greater for girls whose mothers worked.

With respect to future life expectations, except for occupational aspirations already mentioned, research has paid scant attention to possible

changes maternal employment may effect regarding children's desire for marriage, children, travel, success, wealth, etc.

Method

Sample

The present sample of 176 students was drawn from intact, urban families located in the east and midwest. The working mothers were currently employed and had worked full-time at least five years previous to the study. The nonworking mothers were currently unemployed and were unemployed for five years previous to the study. The preadolescent sample (N=109) consisting of 54 males (27 working mother; 27 nonworking mother) and 55 females (28 working mother; 27 nonworking mother) had a mean age of 11.2 (range 9-12). The adolescent sample (N=67) consisting of 38 males (18 working mother; 20 nonworking mother) and 29 females (14 working mother; 15 nonworking mother) had a mean age of 15.8 (range 13-18). Measures of the father's socioeconomic status and the mother's educational level were obtained in both samples. Tests of chi-square revealed no significant differences in the distribution of these two variables between working and nonworking mothers.

Procedure and Analysis

Each child was individually interviewed covering a series of questions subsumed under five major categories. These categories were:

1. Parent-child relationships
    a. activities with parents
    b. discussion of personal/school problems
    c. issues of disagreement with parents
    d. more frequent agreement with which parent
    e. preference for which parental role

f. household chore demands

g. parent dispensing punishment

2. Peronal problems of children

a. issues of worry and concern

3. Sex role ideology

a. should women with children work?

b. why/why not?

4. Educational and career aspirations

a. plans to attend college

b. choice of occupation/career

5. Future life orientation

a. things they want, or way they want things to be

Information was also obtained regarding parental age, occupation, and educational attainment. The subjects were encouraged to ask for clarification of any questions and to offer any additional comments.

Chi-square analyses were conducted on these dependent variables with differences between working and nonworking mothers tested while controlling for sex and social class differences.

Results and Discussion

Preadolescent Sample

Only two variables were found to be significant and these pertained to sex role ideology: "Should women with children work?" and the reasons for choice, "Why/why not/" Regarding the first variable (Table 1) children with

[Insert Table 1 about here]

working mothers were more likely to say "Yes"(78.2%), while those with nonworking mothers were more likely to say "No" (56.9%), X^2 (1) = 12.3, p <.005.

With respect to reasons for their answer, children with working mothers were more likely to say either "Necessary to make money" (32%) or "Women should be free to choose" (22%), while children with nonworking mothers were more likely to support the notion that "Mothers should be home with their children" (57.1%), X^2 (6) = 17.5, p <.008.

The significance of these two variables held constant when sex and social class were controlled, but distinct patterns emerged. Daughters of working mothers (Table 2) overwhelmingly approved of women with children

[Insert Table 2 about here]

working (92.9%); however, daughters of women who did not work also opted for this view, their responses more evenly divided between "Yes"(48%) and "No" (52%). X^2 (1) = 11.0, p <.0009. Supporting their position that mothers should work, daughters of working mothers were more likely to state "Necessary to make money" (36%) or "Women should be free to choose" (24%). Daughters of nonworking mothers, however, supported the idea that "Mothers should be home" (58.3%), X^2 (5) = 15.4, p <.009. No comparable differences emerged with boys on either of these two variables. With respect to social class, a provocative finding regarding the question, "Should women with children work?" concerned the absence of differences between children of working and nonworking mothers in professional families, although differences did emerge at the other two levels (Table 3). A clear majority of

[Insert Table 3 about here]

children from managerial families with working mothers answered "Yes" (85.7%), while children with nonworking mothers were more evenly divided in their choices, X^2 (1) = 4.6, p <.03. Similarly, a majority of children from working class families with working mothers answered "Yes" (75%), however,

children of nonworking mothers primarily answered "No" (61.1%), X^2 (1) = 4.2, $p < .04$. There were no differences in the responses of the three social classes regarding reasons for women working.

These preadolescent answers appear to be consistent with their level of cognitive development (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969), and thus, grounded in their own concrete family experiences. Those with working mothers supported the idea, while those with nonworking mothers may have responded in the negative in accord with their family condition. Conceivably, they may also have been aware of the economic necessity in their family situation for the mother's working. This hypothesis derives some substantiation from the data: lower income children supported women with children working, while there was no difference between the children from professional families. The responses of the professional family children may have been influenced by a different conceptualization of the term work as they perceived it in their household, since many of their mothers are frequently involved in volunteer "work", or possibly, the "advantages" that accrue to these children that make for a wider exposure and interaction in the culture, enabled them to consider and respond to the question more objectively, regardless of the home situation. Also, for the preadolescent girl who is more closely tied to the family at this level than the boy, there may have been a more powerful role modeling effect.

Adolescent Sample

No significance was found in this sample for any of the variables. That the relationship between maternal employment/nonemployment and sex role ideology demonstrated in the preadolescent sample was not replicated in this sample suggests that developmental differences were operating. Conceivably, the adolescents' ability to think in the abstract (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969)

enabled them to evaluate more objectively the question,"Should women with children work?",and thus, they entertained it independently of the reality of their mothers' working or not. They may have recognized a social injustice in women being relegated solely to child care. Their attitudes may also have been influenced by their exposure to opinions expressed in a wider social milieu of peers, school, and mass media -- opinions that supported the equality of women and the idea of women having both a career and family.

Conclusions and Implications

That only two of the many variables tested were significant, and this only at the preadolescent level, suggests that full-time maternal employment, as compared with maternal nonemployment, has few effects on the behaviors and attitudes of school-age children from intact families, and that these effects tend to diminish along the developmental continuum. It may be that during the school years when children of working and nonworking mothers are out of the home for much of the day and for the major part of their activities, children of working mothers may not differ in their contact with and access to parents. Maternal employment, therefore, may not have a disruptive or differentiating effect on intrafamily relationships and interactions.

The results may also be interpreted in terms of Erikson's (1963) proposal that development occurs through interaction with an ever-widening social radius. During the school years, children move progressively into the greater society, interact with a greater number and difference social institutions and persons, and establish identifications with other models of power and significance. Sources of influence shift gradually from being those solely of the family to include other members of society and other

social institutions and family influence is attenuated. Thus, children's attitudes would not be predominately shaped by family circumstances, and maternal employment may be a limited factor in differentiating the attitudes of children of working and nonworking mothers. This would be more true of adolescents who are exposed to a larger society and are also subject to a larger society and are also subject to heavy peer pressures. The present data provide some substantiation for this hypothesis.

It is also conceivable, of course, that the effects of maternal employment are subtle and require the probing of indirect, projective techniques to be identified rather than the interviews used here, or they may be delayed and require longitudinal studies. Furthermore, it may be that a simple comparison of data in terms of working/nonworking mothers may be too simplistic an approach for a complex issue. Maternal employment has numerous correlates -- the nature of the mother's employment; the quality of the substitute care provided; the father's attitude toward the mother's employment; the degree of responsibility the working mother must assume in the home; the mother's job satisfaction -- so, perhaps these should be taken into account in future research.

As mentioned originally, there has been no substantial evidence indicating that maternal employment, per se, has a detrimental effect, or even a consistently differentiating effect, on the behaviors and attitudes of children, and the present study provides little data to dispute this. If, however, social action -- the encouragement or discouragement of maternal employment -- is to be taken on the basis of empirical studies, perhaps additional research should be conducted that takes into consideration some of the related factors mentioned, but perhaps more important, research of a longitudinal nature.

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Table 1

Comparison of Preadolescent Responses to Selected Questions by Working/Nonworking Mother

Question	Percentage of Response: Working Mother	N[a]	Nonworking Mother	N	X^2
1. Should women with children work?					
Yes	78.2	43	43.1	22	
No	21.8	12	56.9	29	12.3*
2. Why/why not?					
a. Women should be free to choose	22.0	11	10.2	5	
b. Necessary to make money	32.0	16	16.3	8	
c. Mothers should be home	20.0	10	57.1	28	17.5*
d. OK if children are older	18.0	9	16.3	8	
e. Kids have more freedom	4.0	2	--	--	
f. Other	4.0	2	--	--	

[a]Percentages based only on cases responding to this question

*$p < .005$

Table 2

Comparison of Female Preadolescent Responses to Selected Questions by Working/Nonworking Mother

Question	Percentage of Response: Working Mother	N[a]	Nonworking Mother	N	X^2
1. Should women with children work?					
Yes	92.9	26	48.0	12	11.0*
No	7.1	2	52.0	13	
2. Why/why not?					
a. Women should be free to choose	24.0	6	12.5	3	
b. Necessary to make money	36.0	9	16.7	4	
c. Mothers should be home	8.0	2	58.3	14	15.4*
d. OK if children are older	20.0	5	12.5	3	
e. Kids have more freedom	8.0	2	--	--	
f. Other	4.0	1	--	--	

[a]Percentages based only on cases responding to this question

*$p < .005$

Table 3

Social Class[a] Comparisons of Preadolescent Responses to Selected Questions by Working/Nonworking Mother

Question	Percentage of Response: Working Mother	N[b]	Nonworking Mother	N	X^2
1. Should women with children work?					
Professional					
Yes	76.5	13	50.0	9	1.6
No	23.5	4	50.0	9	
Managerial					
Yes	85.7	12	40.0	6	4.6*
No	14.3	2	60.0	9	
Blue Collar					
Yes	75.0	18	38.9	7	4.2*
No	25.0	6	61.1	11	

[a]Based on father's occupation

[b]Percentages based only on cases responding to this question

*$p < .05$